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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000304

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/GAVITO;  
DEPT PASS TO EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE

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SUBJECT: LEBANON: SINIORA ON ARAB LEAGUE, REQUESTS TO ARAB  
STATES, EURO TRIP

REF: STATE 19473

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.5 (b),  
(d)

[1](#)1. Action Request - see para 13.

[1](#)2. SUMMARY. Informed by Charge that U.S. would ask Arab League and GCC capitals to support Lebanon ahead of the March 5-6 Arab League meeting and GCC Ministerial, Lebanese PM Fouad Siniora asked that the U.S. be more specific in describing the Lebanese political impasse. He told Charge of his recent requests to Saudi Arabia, UAE and Kuwait for additional financial support, particularly central bank deposits of \$1 billion each from KSA and UAE and \$0.5 billion from Kuwait. Siniora expressed satisfaction that his trip to Europe had fostered more support for his government and the March 14 alliance, adding that EU foreign affairs envoy Javier Solana will visit Lebanon March 4. End Summary.

#### ARAB LEAGUE SUMMIT ISSUES -----

[1](#)3. (C) Charge Sison, accompanied by DCM, met with PM Fouad Siniora on February 27 at the Grand Serail. The PM's aides Mohamed Chatah and Roula Nourredine also attended. Charge conveyed the demarche regarding Lebanon and other subjects in preparation for March 5-6 Arab League meeting (reftel). In reaction, Siniora and his aides expressed strong concern that the wording on the Lebanon situation did not provide sufficient justification to motivate other Arab League members to boycott or lower their representation at the Damascus Summit.

[1](#)4. (C) In the discussion that followed, the PM and his aides suggested changing the demarche language contained in para 3 of reftel. They asked that if possible, U.S. embassies use the revised language and, in AL capitals where the demarche had already been delivered, follow up with additional points.

Delete: "Syria is allowing Lebanon's impasse to continue", which Siniora said implies excessive authority for Syria to decide on Lebanon's future. Replace with wording that indicates that Syria (and Iran) are preventing a resolution to the Lebanese stalemate.

Delete: "Should the Lebanese not elect a president before the Summit..." which does not explain adequately who in Lebanon is at fault, they said. Replace with wording that indicates Syria and Iran and their allies in Lebanon are preventing a resolution to the impasse.

[1](#)5. (C) Siniora had no substantive reaction to the other subjects in the demarche, Kosovo and Iraq. On Kosovo independence, he revealed that the Russian Ambassador had visited him and the Foreign Minister to express a negative view, but had not used strong language about it.

SINIORA ASKS SAUDIS, EMIRATIS AND KUWAITIS FOR FINANCIAL  
HELP, AND SOON  
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[1](#)6. (C) Siniora also discussed his recent trip to Kuwait and his requests to the Saudi, Kuwaiti and Emirati governments for financial assistance. With Lebanon facing a government financing crunch in March, he said that he had asked the Saudi and UAE governments each to make a deposit of \$1 billion in the Lebanese central bank and Kuwait to deposit \$0.5 billion to boost confidence and help Lebanon through a difficult period. He said he had followed up in writing to all three repeating his request.

[1](#)7. (C) Siniora asked that the USG follow up with the three Gulf states to underscore the urgency of the request (note: the promised Saudi \$1 billion deposit has not arrived in Lebanon yet. End note).

[1](#)8. (C) Siniora also asked Kuwait to assume the task of

overhauling Lebanon's two main electricity generation plants, a project totaling \$80 million, and for better terms for Lebanese petroleum purchases (paying interest of LIBOR, instead of "LIBOR plus", he said). His primary interlocutor was the Kuwaiti prime minister. Siniora was in Kuwait when the controversy arose over a ceremony honoring slain Hizballah leader Imad Mughniya. He did not see the Kuwaiti

BEIRUT 00000304 002 OF 002

emir, as he normally does because, he said, the emir was ill. Siniora said he spoke to emir later, from Europe, and the emir was absorbed with the controversy and very angry about it.

19. (C) Charge asked about Siniora's meeting with Egyptian president Mubarak. Mubarak is skeptical of the Syrians and skeptical of convening the Arab Summit, Siniora said, and thinks there needs to be stronger efforts with the Syrians. Siniora said 14 of the Arab League members had indicated they would attend the Summit at a high level. Lebanon still has not received an invitation.

EUROPE: STRONG SUPPORT, AND SOLANA TO BE THE UNIFIED VOICE ON LEBANON?

110. (C) Siniora traveled to UK, France and Germany after his trip to Egypt, Saudi Arabian and the Gulf. He said he complained that Europe has "too many voices" speaking out on Lebanon and urged that instead there be a unified position and strong message "that Syria understands." French president Sarkozy agreed and said he would ask for an EU mandate for Javier Solana. Siniora said he spoke to Solana who would be coming to Lebanon March 4. The PM said that he got support from the British and, in Germany, from both Chancellor Merkel and the Foreign Minister. The German FM had been disappointed by Syria's reactions to Germany's overture to Syria, Siniora said, implying that Germany would not make such a mistake again.

RESIGNED LABOR MINISTER MAY DISRUPT REFORM OF SOCIAL SECURITY FUND

111. (C) Charge asked about the case of the resigned Labor Minister Trad Hamadeh. Hamadeh was one of six cabinet members who offered their resignations and left the cabinet in November 2006. He recently returned to work and rumors in Beirut suggest the reason is to affect the outcome of upcoming election to the board of directors of the National Social Security Fund. Siniora described efforts he made as Finance Minister to reform the Fund's board and the limited success he had. The Fund is in great need for reform, and Hamadeh, Siniora said, is returning to try to slow that reform.

BILATERAL ISSUES: MARKABAWI CASE; FOREIGN ASSISTANCE

112. (C) Charge asked for the PM's help with the case of an Amcit child, Kristin Markabawi. Her Syrian mother fears that she, Kristin and Kristin's sister will be prevented from departing Lebanon for the U.S. because of actions by the child's Syrian father. Siniora promised his office would contact relevant GOL agencies to check on the case. Charge also asked for assistance addressing the foot dragging in the MFA on the long-stalled bilateral agreement governing U.S. foreign assistance to Lebanon.

113. (C) ACTION REQUEST. In light of PM Siniora's comments, Embassy recommends Department take the following two actions. First, ask embassies in Arab League members who have received refrel to modify the demarche they deliver, or deliver a separate message, to reflect Siniora's input (para 2). Second, ask Embassies Riyadh, Abu Dhabi and Kuwait to support the recent requests from PM Siniora to their host governments for their financial assistance.

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